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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

NSC FOR MGAVIN, LETIM
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SUBJECT: USAID Acting Administrator Meeting with State Minister of Humanitarian Affairs in Khartoum

11. (SBU) Summary: On October 24, USAID Acting Administrator Alonzo Fulgham and Acting Assistant Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance (USAID/DCHA) Susan Reichle met with State (Deputy) Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, H.E. Dr. Abdel Bagi El-Geilani as part of an October 24 to 27 delegation visit to Sudan. Discussions centered on NGO security, disposition of expelled non-governmental organization (NGO) assets, and Sudanization. End summary.

SECURITY

12. (SBU) USAID Acting Administrator Alonzo Fulgham began the meeting thanking the Minister for his efforts to facilitate humanitarian work in Sudan. The Acting Administrator expressed concern regarding the recent kidnapping of an International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) international staff member and highlighted the fact that impunity for the abductors impinges on security and impedes humanitarian work. The State Minister replied that the Government of Sudan (GOS) condemns the abductions and opined that as long as people in Darfur are poor, illiterate, and armed, such kidnappings would continue. The State Minister later noted that ICRC had received a phone call from the kidnapped staff member but that no money had been demanded to date. (Note: International media sources also indicate no ransom demand as yet for the ICRC kidnapping. End note.) He said that the GOAL kidnapping took a long time to resolve because no ransom was paid (Note: October 26 press reports indicate that the Minister had said that money was paid to "facilitate" the work of mediators for the release of the GOAL staff, held captive over 100 days. End note.)

13. (SBU) The State Minister proposed that the GOS develop an infrastructure of "smart intelligence" surrounding NGO guesthouses and offices, including a protective eye of unarmed guards. (Note: This is likely a reference to increasing National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) presence near NGO compounds. End note.) The State Minister has traveled to El Fasher to discuss the matter with humanitarian agencies. The State Minister relayed that UN African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) and Red Cross representatives had agreed with the proposal. In addition, the GOS has appealed to the local administration to mobilize and highlight the issue of kidnapping in tribal meetings, urging the groups to collectively tackle the wave of abductions. The State Minister indicated that the GOS would work to bring the kidnappers to punishment by all means.

14. (SBU) The State Minister further opined that the solution to the kidnapping lies in development of the area and that current

humanitarian operations create dependency. The State Minister stated that development is possible in Darfur, as the area is stable, with only banditry continuing to create problems. The State Minister further asserted that internally displaced persons (IDPs) are returning voluntarily due to the improved security and that the remaining challenge will be to determine how to keep returnees in their villages.

15. (SBU) Following earlier meetings in which negative press about NGOs was discussed (see reftel), Acting Administrator Fulgham asked the State Minister to describe GOS efforts to combat negative media messages. The State Minister stated that his role is to highlight international NGO work and that his office is open to promoting positive messages in the press.

BUREAUCRATIC IMPEDIMENTS AND ASSET DISPOSITION

16. (SBU) Acting Administrator Fulgham relayed NGO concerns regarding facilitation of humanitarian work that the GOS had promised but not delivered, including handing over expelled NGO assets to new affiliate NGOs. The Acting Administrator noted that the GOS had agreed to return assets of all U.S.-funded NGOs. The State Minister replied that he had not previously heard that such problems remain and that from the GOS perspective, facilitation of humanitarian work is on track.

17. (SBU) The State Minister further asserted that NGO country agreements state that assets brought in to the country by NGOs belong to the GOS and that if an NGO is expelled, the assets are turned over to the government. The Government of National Unity is

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not involved in the contract between donors and NGOs, which may delineate donor expectations regarding asset disposition. The Acting Administrator noted that continued obstruction on this issue, with NGOs still lacking access to the assets, reflects poorly upon the GOS commitment to move forward with the GOS-U.S. relationship. The State Minister replied that the GOS is ready to make assets available for affiliate NGOs working in the same areas and conducting the same programs as expelled NGOs. (Note: This distinction is not contained in the GOS-USSES agreement and confuses the issue, as most affiliate NGOs have redesigned program activities and areas due to gap-filling by other NGOs and UN agencies post-March 4. End note.) Fulgham stated that U.S. Government takes seriously any seizure of U.S.-funded assets and will continue to follow up on this issue.

SUDANIZATION

18. (SBU) During a brief mention about the recent push for "Sudanization" of humanitarian work, the State Minister noted that the Sudanization policy came as a presidential directive and, therefore, must be respected, noting that the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs (MoHA) has plans for implementation of the directive. However, the State Minister assured the USAID Acting Administrator that further expulsions will not be linked to this directive and that, on the contrary, the GOS desires close cooperation with international NGOs. The State Minister also stated that many NGOs are present within Sudan and that capacity-building is necessary to enable these organizations to conduct the work.

19. (U) The delegation cleared this cable prior to departure.

WHITEHEAD